

**ISSUES AND TRENDS
IN
FOOD SERVICE MANAGEMENT**

by

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ISSUES AND TRENDS IN FOOD SERVICE MANAGEMENT

INTRODUCTION

Today, Child Nutrition Programs (CNPs) are operating in a climate of change. The CNPs of today have learned to adjust to change. Participation continues to be a concern because CNPs are compared to the commercial food service industry and are expected to compete and perform as a commercial foodservice operation. Modernization in the commercial food service industry has made students more sophisticated customers. To assure that CNPs are on target to meet present and future demands, program operators must be sensitive to the trends and issues that have a direct influence on their market.

The purpose of this study was to review four trade and four research publications to determine significant food service management trends and issues that may affect CNPs. Today's issues and trends should be viewed as the opportunities of tomorrow. This is the first effort by the National Food Service Management Institute to conduct a review of literature to determine issues and trends.

METHOD

Content Analysis

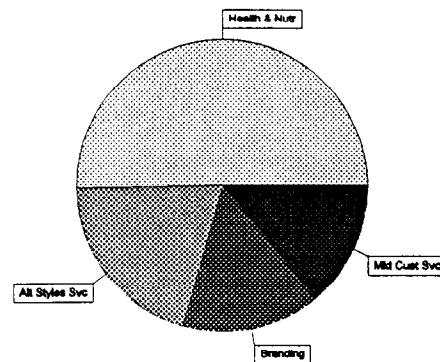
During the period January through April, 1995, Deborah Carr, Research Associate for the National Food Service Management Institute conducted a review of literature using four trade publications and four research publications related to food service management. The review was not intended to be an exhaustive review, but an initial analysis to identify emerging issues and how those issues impact CNPs. The trade publications reviewed were: *School Foodservice and Nutrition*, *Restaurants and Institutions*, *Food Service Director*, and *Food Management*. Research publications reviewed were: *Journal of Nutrition Education*, *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, *School Food Service Research Review*, and *Journal of School Health*. The period of time selected for review of literature was 1994. Upon review of those publications, it was apparent that similar subjects were being discussed. Thus subject matter was collapsed into four sub-categories; Health and Nutrition, Alternative Styles of Service, Food Service Marketing for Customer Service and Branding.



RESULTS

One hundred and one trade or research publications were reviewed with a total of 141 articles highlighted for this report (Appendix). Figure 1 depicts the percentage of articles from each sub-category. Health and Nutrition represented 50% of the total articles reviewed, Alternative Styles of Service represented 20%, Branding represented 15% and Marketing for Customer Service represented 14%.

Figure 1



HEALTH AND NUTRITION

There is a great deal of focus on issues related to Health and Nutrition. Of the articles reviewed, similar issues were highlighted in both trade and research publications. Nutrition education is needed for all individuals. Hunger and poor health attacks all groups. Today society is hearing and responding to an immense amount of information regarding Health and Nutrition. It appears that the general public is observant of this information, but today's lifestyles provide many challenges in applying nutrition information on a consistent basis. Two-thirds of all deaths are related to diet (1). Six of the ten leading causes of death have a nutrition-related component (2). Therefore, it is important that this area of focus be in the vanguard to assure a healthier society.

A healthful diet for children is particularly important considering the long-term implications of food choices on health later in life. Research also recognizes the need to include parents of school-aged children in the nutrition education process (3). Early childhood nutrition education programs may help children develop good food habits (4). This would provide a positive long-term effect on society's health. The literature supports information that children are a vulnerable population. Families with children have become the fastest growing group of homeless (5). Also, there is great concern for the poor. As the gap between the poor and wealthy widens, this high-risk group is faced with difficult challenges (6). This trend is a real concern in light of the recent national debate concerning programs affecting children.

Other related topics that surfaced in publications reviewed were: healthy snacking, food safety, food labels, accident prevention, food biotechnology, special health care needs, fat reduction, the Food Guide Pyramid, healthy lifestyle habits, food safety curriculum and School Meals Initiative for Healthy Children.



ALTERNATIVE STYLES OF SERVICE

Alternative styles of foodservice are an indication of a market that is sensitive to a diverse customer pool. The days of having a service provided in one way are no longer the norm. Coinless vending, remote display cases, and food courts are prevalent. The customer no longer must tolerate a dining environment that lends itself to a straight line stainless steel counter and dim lighting. Operational managers are vigorously making an effort to provide customers with a multitude of choices in which they are served. These managers view this as a way of providing a refreshing new look to a growing foodservice industry. Many alternative styles of service are an attempt to be responsive to the needs of the customer. They are designed to increase productivity, provide adaptability and guarantee convenience, while maximizing labor.

There is a new generation of foodservice that stresses choice and quick service (7). The literature reviewed suggests the customer driven approach is being enhanced and developed for different populations. These populations include schools, healthcare, industry, and prisons. Today time is a valuable commodity, therefore, we have a generation of customers that eat on the go. Although the customer desires convenience, they are not willing to sacrifice variety, better perceived value and a nice atmosphere when they dine (8).

Alternative styles of service that emerged during the review include: coinless vending, deli style, food court, self-serve, debit cards, multi-eating options, catering, flexible meal service, satellite operations, remote display case, and freestanding kiosk.

BRANDING

The branding concept is a trend that has exploded to the forefront of the foodservice industry. For some, branding provides a perceived value of quality. For years the commercial foodservice industry has developed manufacture-brand products. The customer associates the product brand name with a perceived value of quality. If the customer perceives the product having value, the branding concept could generate high acceptance in an operation. When the perceived value of the product is poor the end result is poor acceptability of the product. In branding, the reputation of the product is associated solely with the brand name.

According to one foodservice consultant, branding could be a two edged sword for an operator if the time and money are not invested initially to assure success. Branding can provide a less fragmented approach to operational procedures and increase standardization. Ultimately branding assures consistency in the product. Although branding allows for ownership, some operators view this trend with the misconception that it will correct all their problems, while for others, branding is not an option because they fail to explore the pros and cons of this concept (9).

The literature suggests that commercial and noncommercial foodservice markets are offering commercially branded products in their operation as a way of attracting customers. Branding has



caught the attention of the customer, resulting in increased participation. This same concept can work when an in-house brand is developed. Another approach is to bundle a branded item with an in-house brand or bundling of double-branded items. An example is when different chain brands make a cooperative plan of providing their service within one location, thus creating the branded food-court concept (10). Valid areas of concern have been identified for CNPs when considering the incorporation of branding in their operation. Some of these concerns included products occasionally costing too much, not meeting the reimbursable meal pattern, or that companies sponsoring products command the school to charge retail prices (11). These concerns are significant for a program that operates on a non-profit basis and is required to offer a quality reimbursable meal for minimal financial reimbursement.

Related topics on this trend were: branding through vending, branding in grab and go, ethnic niche, menu branding themes and commercially branded products.

MARKETING FOR CUSTOMER SERVICE

The foodservice industry has focused new emphasis on the customer through marketing. Many times foodservice operators forget that customers make the difference to the bottom line. It is too easy for operators to get caught up in making money and completing the job. When this happens they tend to overlook the importance of the customer (12).

The literature reviewed suggests operators too often view new ideas with tunnel vision. In lieu of looking only to the market in which they work, operators could benefit if they look outside their market segment for direction (13). With the blurring of commercial and noncommercial operational boundaries, there is increase similarity. This likeness will allow operators to benefit from the success of others, if they take time to consider the possible applications to their own operations.

Remodeling

Facility remodeling is an approach to customer service that many operators are using when looking for ways of marketing their service. This image improving step involved new lighting, colored tile floors, food court atmosphere, neon signs, creative serving lines, and cluster style seating. The objective of remodeling in many cafeterias is to create an upscale design (14). This approach of image differentiation allows the operation to have a unique ambiance. Remodeling for enhanced image appears to have allowed dismal, passé appearing facilities to become transformed into establishments that are desired by the customer.



Promotions

Promotions captivate and capture the customer. Many times this approach is not new, but provides a fresh and creative new approach that grabs the attention of the customer (15). Promotions are an excellent way of incorporating nutrition education into the operation. The school classroom provides many opportunities for integrating nutrition education into the curriculum. Time and effort, combined with a clever approach, will advance the school setting into a learning lab for nutrition education (16).

Food Service operations ranging from schools to restaurants, are looking for ways to increase participation and revenue by attracting children. Adults view this as a service that provides support to their parental responsibilities. Services offered vary from new and improved nutritious menus, children eating free, promotions, customer feed-back, and free babysitting (17,18). In light of the legislative uncertainty evolving around Child Nutrition Programs, it is imperative that services offered are marketed in a manner that transmits a positive message to the customer while providing a valued service.

Related issues on this topic included: customer satisfaction, quality service, and service challenges.

APPLICATION OF TRENDS

Application of food service trends assist directors in shaping the future of CNPs. Recommendations for Child Nutrition operators focus on incorporating these issues and trends in CNPs. There are issues that the CNP decision maker should evaluate prior to implementation of these trends. The following questions have been developed to facilitate the decision process.

- How can the CNP operator market the NSLP and NSBP as a primary source of nutrients for all children, and receive valued as a vital part to long term healthcare?
- How will CNPs balance their financial goals of being a nonprofit business with more focus being placed on their role as a health and nutrition program?
- If national nutrition standards are eliminated, what yardstick would be used in planning food offerings?
- How much time and money will need to be allocated for training to implement new nutrition standards?
- How can CNPs partner with the educational community to provide quality nutrition education to students?



- How can the CNP operator access nutrition education materials that are available for little or no charge?
- How can the CNP operator identify alternative styles of service best suited to meet their program goals?
- What steps are needed to determine the profitability through increased participation when an alternative style of service is implemented?
- When planning for new facilities or alternative styles of service, what considerations must be given to government regulations such as meal count systems?
- How can the CNP operator determine which styles of service may be long term trends and which may be a short lived fad?
- How would the CNP operator establish a signature brand for their program?
- What consideration must be given to regulations when serving a commercially branded product?
- Do commercially branded products have a long term positive affect on participation?
- Do commercially branded products increase plate cost and does participation increase accordingly?
- What impact will branding have on providing a health conscience menu?
- How much time is needed to implement a successful marketing program?
- What marketing approach is most effective toward reaching the school community?
- How can the school community partner in implementing a successful marketing program?
- What guidelines can the CNP operator use to identify a changing market environment and customer demands in order to keep the marketing program current?
- What resources are available to the CNP operator to support the changing demands placed on them to assure a successful and valued program?



SUMMARY

In summary, the issues and trends gleaned through reviewing literature can provide Child Nutrition operators with information that will help them meet diverse operational demands. (Child Nutrition programs operate in a volatile environment that is changing rapidly. The articles reviewed reflect the concerns of a market that places the customer at the center of the operation.) It is the intent of the National Food Service Management Institute to provide Child Nutrition operators with information that can be used to improve daily operations.



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